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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes a 22-month ethnographic study of rural Shandon (California), a community that demonstrates the social and demographic changes resulting from agricultural intensification in rural California. Changes in the Shandon area's agricultural production have produced a demographic shift from the homogeneous Anglo-American farming and ranching community of the 1960s to the current heterogeneous community, where over one-third of the population consists of Mexican-American farm laborers producing high value, labor intensive, specialty crops. This shift was documented by school district records. A strong ethnic boundary separates Shandon's American and Mexican communities, but flagrant systematic discrimination is found only in the rental housing market. Children of both groups readily cross the ethnic boundary, influenced by systematic integration and small class size in Shandon schools. Consequently, Mexican-American children have graduation rates and occupational mobility equivalent to Anglo children. Because of low wages, a prosperous agriculture in California actually has added to the number of local poor, and has done so in the form of an ethnically distinct immigrant population. In areas similar to Shandon, the scale and composition of foreign immigration stimulate a nativist reaction and increase ethnic tensions in the absence of racially divided labor markets, racially based systems of exploitation and discrimination, or economic crises. (RAH)

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Draft

Heterogeneity in Rural California and the Example of Shandon

by

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Brian Haley, UC Santa Barbara

Since the 1960s large parts of rural California have been undergoing a type of change which differentiates rural California from much of the rest of rural America. The key component of this change is the intensification of the state's agribusiness through the expansion of high value, labor intensive specialty crops, particularly fresh fruits and vegetables, nursery plants, and crops used to produce premium processed foods such as wine. Not long ago, the Los Angeles Times reported that agriculture is the only healthy sector of California's economy (Woutat 1993). We should also note that it depends heavily on immigrant and migrant labor, primarily from Mexico.

Agricultural intensification has brought changes to rural California which tend to go unreported and are certainly under-appreciated. Over half a million immigrant farm workers and their families have settled permanently in California's rural communities because of the employment opportunities created by this agricultural prosperity. The current farm structure enables former migrant farm workers and their families to settle permanently in rural communities near their places of work, because farm employment can be obtained often for as much as 10 months out of the year. This process has been observed in at least 150 rural communities throughout the state, and in one half to two thirds of these the Mexican immigrants are now the majority of the local population (Palerm 1989; 1991). However, the wages these workers earn force roughly half of them to live below the poverty level (Rosenberg *et al.* 1993). Thus, a prosperous agriculture in California adds to the ranks of the local poor, and does so in the form of an ethnically distinct immigrant population.

This, of course, contrasts sharply with the image that American rural poverty is associated with farm decline. Yet indeed, in the midst of a healthy agricultural economy, these rural communities experience a consistent set of problems. There is increasing absentee farm ownership, "white flight" by many original members of the community, decline of local businesses, a shrinking tax base, chronic underemployment among farm workers, and ethnic tension. And at a time of greater need for public services, there is insufficient health care, new educational needs, and a critical shortage of adequate housing.

This might be of less concern to us were these changes more visible so that resources to address issues such as rural poverty could be brought to bear. Unfortunately, this new population is nearly invisible. Persistent rural poverty areas in the United States have recently been identified by the U.S. Census Bureau (*Agricultural Outlook* September 1993: 22-27). According to the Census Bureau, there is no persistent rural poverty in California. The reasons for this are that most major agricultural counties in California are metropolitan counties. Poverty in them is not rural. For example, Santa Barbara County is metropolitan with an above average annual per capita income, yet its agriculture produces $500 million a year and employs up to 30,000 farm workers and their families who live in poverty in ethnic enclaves such as the town of Guadalupe.

It is similar with immigration for farm employment in these counties: immigration issues and its associated ethnic tensions are viewed as urban problems. The dominant image of ethnic tensions associated with immigration is provided by Los Angeles, which is a very different milieu from that of a small rural community. Guadalupe, the community I've just mentioned in Santa Barbara County, has a population of 5,400 which is 83% Latino. It is unreasonable to equate conditions in a community like this with those found in Los Angeles.

In some non-metropolitan counties such as California's Central and North Coast wine country, growth of a Mexican farm working population is masked by growth of more prosperous segments

of the population at the same time. California's counties are large enough to offer the space for both patterns of development (*e.g.* retirement communities, wealthy second homes, etc.). Sometimes the development of a single specialty crop contributes to growth in both poor Mexican farm worker and well-to-do Anglo American populations. This is the case in the small scale super premium wine industry in the Santa Ynez Valley of Santa Barbara County, for example (Haley 1989).

To further compound the problem, most of the rural communities experiencing growth of a Mexican farm worker population are well off the beaten path. Major highways typically bypass these communities and seldom do these towns have their own media to represent themselves to the outside world. All too often an urban-based news media fails to grasp the true nature of events in these communities.

Thus, in rural California communities we have to find new ways to shed light on issues surrounding rural poverty and ethnic tension, certainly one which takes us away from dependency on the Census. One way to do this is through community ethnography, and a number of us at UCSB are engaged in research of this kind under the direction of Prof. Juan Vicente Palerm. I shall give you an example from my own dissertation research in Shandon, California where I resided for 22 months from fall 1989 to summer 1991 while examining the nature of ethnic relations in the community.[1]

Shandon, California is the community presented by the anthropologist Elvin Hatch in his book, *Biography of a Small Town* (Hatch 1979). It lies midway between Los Angeles and San Francisco in a sparsely populated part of the central coast region. Because of Hatch's research, we know that in the mid-1960s Shandon was a homogeneous Anglo-American farming and ranching community of about 500 people. Today it is about a third Mexican immigrant. But in the 1960s, most of the inhabitants were the families of local farmers, ranchers, and their Anglo-American hired hands.

A major point I would like to make is that economic crisis theories or race-based approaches to ethnic relations, such as Split Labor Market and Internal Colonialism theories, fail to describe conditions in a community like Shandon. The ethnography of Shandon reveals that a much simpler explanation is far more accurate. It demonstrates that the sheer number of unassimilated foreign immigrants generates its own very significant level of ethnic tension in the absence of the conditions dictated by these more complex ethnic relations models.

During my stay in Shandon, I interviewed growers, farm workers, school employees, community leaders, youth, and other local residents to document agricultural changes, identify the local issues associated with the quality of ethnic relations and their importance relative to other local issues. By residing there daily and participating in community life, I was able to make systematic, repetitive, and longitudinal observations of people's words and actions regarding ethnic relations, both public and private, to compare to what they said in interviews. My long residence there made it possible to establish a rapport and trust which facilitated access to better quality data, especially on the sensitive issue of ethnic relations. Some data, such as post office

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[1] --Field research in Shandon was supported by a 1989-90 Rural Policy Fellowship from the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation supplemented by a 1991 UCSB General Affiliates Fellowship and a 1991 UCSB Andrew Isbell Memorial Fund Grant.

records and personal incomes, would not have been accessible to me had I chosen a less time consuming method like short field visits to conduct interviews. One example is that after about ten months in the community the school district granted me access to records which made it possible to document the demographic shifts in Shandon in far greater detail than would have been possible through any other method. Access to these data required a high level of trust on their part and a willingness on my part to provide them with information culled from my research which serves their needs.

During the 1960s, cattlemen and major grain farmers were the most prosperous and highest status members of the community. Upland areas were devoted to grain and cattle, lowlands along major drainages to the few irrigated crops—especially alfalfa and sugar beets, and intermediate zones to grain which gave way to other crops as irrigation systems advanced during the 1960s. Irrigation farmers were distinctly lower in status than major grain farmers and cattle ranchers, and farm hands held the lowest status of all. Seasonal farm workers in irrigated crops seldom lived in Shandon, generally coming in only to work. Those very few who did live there constituted an invisible underclass of a few households (Hatch 1979).

The crops and cattle of the 1960s declined in the '70s and '80s while a new crop prospered. This new crop was grapes, primarily premium wine varieties, but also table grapes. Grapes were introduced in the early 1960s in a small experimental plot, but had no real impact until vineyards began to be expanded in the 1970s. This thoroughly transformed the composition and social fabric of Shandon by the time I arrived to do research there in the fall of 1989. More than a third of the 1989 population had settled in Shandon because of this development. Irrigation farmers were no longer the lowest status farmers, and older residents who once "knew everybody in town" now claimed that they "hardly knew anybody."

There are a number of reasons why agricultural intensification instigated vast social changes in Shandon. Farmers did not simply adopt this new crop and continue on in the same working and social relationships with the same farm hands. Generally, only the wealthiest cattle ranchers could afford, or could obtain the capital, to establish and operate a vineyard. Yet even they did not switch from cattle to grapes in mid-stream; in their case the shift was made after control of the ranch transferred to a younger generation.

Most Shandon vineyards were established after a locally owned grain, alfalfa, or sugar beet farm was purchased and converted by an absentee. The displaced farmer typically retired at this point, and the farm hand moved on to another region. They were replaced by new personnel consisting of managers and farm workers of various sorts.

The difference in labor requirements between the old crops and the new has had an enormous impact on the community. At the low end of the spectrum are heavily mechanized wheat and barley, requiring roughly 1.5 to 3.1 person hours/acre/year. Lower still is cattle production, though no comparable figure can be given. It is, nonetheless, very land-extensive in Shandon. Next is alfalfa hay at 12 to 15 p.h/ac., then sugar beets, estimated anywhere between 17 and 55 p.h./ac. In contrast, the grapes which replaced these crops require between 80-127 p.h./ac for wine varieties, and 87-309 p.h./ac for table varieties (Kumar *et al.* 1978; Wilkie and Mamer 1989; Runsten and Chalfant n.d.; Palerm 1991). Most of this labor is provided by Mexican immigrants and migrants.

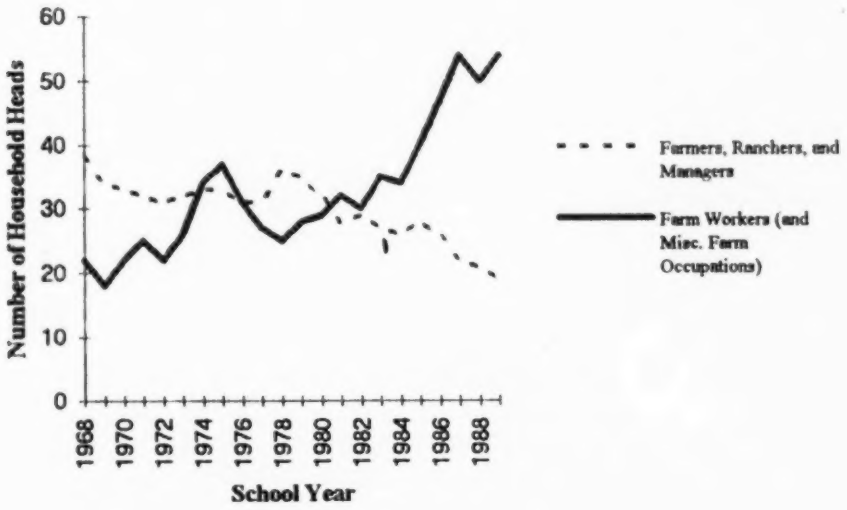
There were nine local irrigated crop farmers in the mid-1960s. Sugar beets began declining in 1971 and were gone by 1984. Alfalfa acreage started to decline in 1977 and three growers

remained in 1990. Cattle began to decline in 1977 and the herd size is roughly half that of the mid-1960s. Wheat acreage started to shrink in 1982 and barley in 1985, both—as with cattle—injured further by the drought of the late 1980s. USDA's Conservation Reserve Program absorbed most of the upland grain land which did not remain in production.

Vineyards were first established in the intermediate zones along the margin between irrigated and non-irrigated lands, and expanded from there into lower irrigated land. Almonds were also tried in this zone and contributed to the need for farm workers. But almonds ultimately were replaced by the more successful grape. A first period of vineyard expansion occurred in 1971-1974 reaching about 2200 acres, a second round from 1977-1982 to about 3300 acres, then most recently from 1989-1991 reaching the current total of about 4000 acres. By 1991 there were 10 grape growers in the Shandon region. The grapes produced from this acreage were worth roughly $16.5 million in 1991 (San Luis Obispo County Agricultural Commissioner 1992).

The impact on community demography is illustrated with data obtained from the local school district (see Figure 1). Obviously, school data do not reflect those households without school children (e.g. retired persons, young couples, and seasonal migrant farm workers); nevertheless, they are instructive. Counts of household heads with children in local schools reveal that in 1968 these were 36% farmers, ranchers, and managers, 21% farm hands, 14% commuters who worked outside the community, and 29% other local non-farm occupations. In contrast, by 1989, farmers, ranchers, and managers were only 11% of these household heads, whereas 31% were farm workers, 34% were commuters, and 23% comprised the remainder. By this time as well Shandon had grown to closer to 700 people.

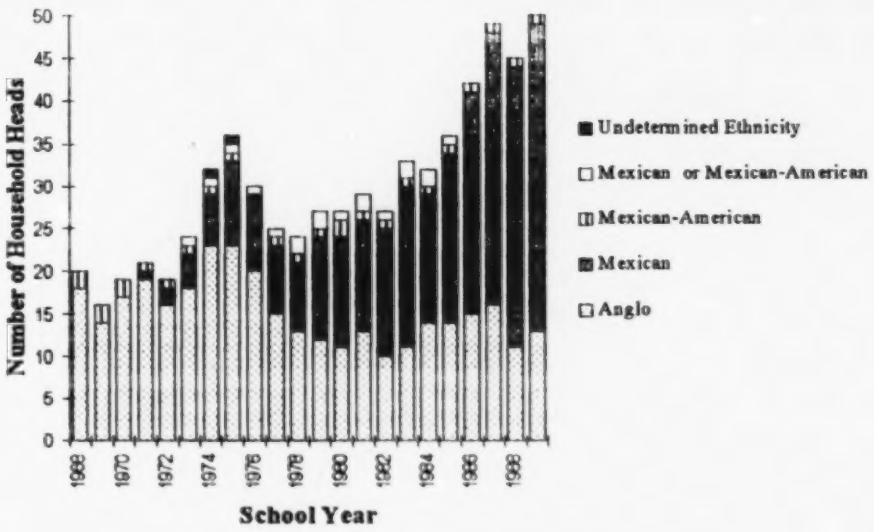
Figure 1: Local household heads with agricultural occupations and children in local schools, Shandon, California, 1968-1989.



Source: Shandon Unified School District records.

The actual counts of these household heads reveal a community growth rate of 64% from 1968 to 1989, occurring mostly after 1974. Over the same period Shandon experienced a 150% increase in the number of farm worker household heads with children in local schools. To compound this change in sheer numbers, is the shift in ethnicity. In 1968, 90% of the farm workers were Anglo-American (see Figure 2). In 1989, 72% of them were Mexican immigrants. The temporary decline in farm worker household heads depicted in the graph after 1975 consists entirely of lost Anglo-American farm workers, just before the second phase of vineyard expansion.

Figure 2: Ethnicity of local farm worker household heads with children in local schools, Shandon, California, 1968-1989



Source: Shandon Unified School District records.

One thing these figures do not reveal is that most of these Mexican parents arrived well before their children were enrolled in local schools. Parents I interviewed whose children were enrolled between 1982 and 1986 were residing and working in the community by 1978. Their children often joined them from Mexico later. Because of this, I do not believe there was an actual temporary drop in the total number of farm workers in the community after 1975, only in the number counted by school enrollments: Anglo farm worker departures were compensated by Mexican arrivals who did not have children with them yet.

The sharp rise in farm working household heads depicted on the graph for 1985-1987 shows this phenomenon, as well. It reflects the impact of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. Parents used the amnesty provisions of this act to legitimize their own immigration status, then took advantage of family reunification procedures to bring their children to the community from Mexico. Even today, however, the school enrollment data vastly undercount the numbers of Mexican farm workers in the community, both in absolute terms and relative to other occupational categories.

One kind of heterogeneity created by this demographic shift concerns class. Mexican vineyard workers are poor, and are chronically so. This factor alone distinguishes them from most other members of the community. Several kinds of vineyard work are created, and these influence the position of the workers and their families in the community. The duration of employment for vineyard workers ranges from two months for peak harvest or pruning season workers, to 11 months for a small cadre of the best and most experienced workers who typically include tractor drivers, irrigators, and crew foremen. It is these latter who settle in the community to the greatest degree.

The irregularity of work during the year limits total incomes. Some workers claim that they do not really get more than six full months of employment during the course of a year. Seasonal work is concentrated during the harvest of late summer and early fall, and the pruning season of winter. The creation of new vineyards expands employment beyond the normal seasonal limitations.

Vineyard wages from 1989 to 1991 were usually $5.00 to $5.50 per hour with a piece rate bonus. A family of four whose only wage earner was a tractor driver earned $14,000 during the 11 months in which there was work in 1989. He also typically obtained $900 to $2000 in unemployment insurance per year. A family of seven in which the husband worked nearly year-round and the wife for two months of pruning earned $16,000 in 1989. A man with two dependents in Mexico worked nine months for $12,000. Over the same period another earned $9700. His wife and five children joined him by November of 1989.

At the same time, rents consume between a third and half of the family's yearly income. For $300 a month there are dilapidated trailers, such as the one occupied by the family of seven. For $500 a month a small, run down house can be obtained. Mexican farm workers could not afford to rent newer homes at the going rate of $700 a month.

These conditions keep many dependents in Mexico, and many workers in a seasonal migrant pattern between Shandon and Mexico. In two and a half years ending in June 1991, over $303,000 in money orders were mailed from Shandon Post Office to Mexico.

Another kind of heterogeneity created by this kind of agricultural development is ethnic diversity. Over a relatively short period of time, Shandon went from a virtually mono-ethnic Anglo-American town to one which is multi-ethnic today and roughly a third foreign immigrant. This demographic shift is typical of the other rural communities we have been studying, though Shandon is unique for the recency of its virtually all Anglo past. There are small numbers of Mexican Americans in the community of varying occupational standings.

Although we anticipate ethnic tensions will surface under these conditions, the exact nature of these tensions in Shandon does not conform neatly to all expectations. In a number of ways, the ethnic relations experience of Shandon contrasts with the predicted effects of race-based or economic crisis theories. I shall consider the following examples: for race-based theories, Edna Bonacich's Split Labor Market and Mario Barrera's version of Internal Colonialism (since it is applied specifically to Latinos in the Southwest), and for economic crisis models, Wayne Cornelius' "nativism" in reaction to Mexican immigration.

Bonacich's concept of the Split Labor Market in race relations has been applied to rural California to illuminate the historical dependency of the state's agriculture on a succession of various foreign labor sources (Cheng and Bonacich 1984; see also Bonacich 1972; 1976). In this

scheme, farm wages are held down by periodically replacing the labor force with one which will work more cheaply. Ethnic tensions are generated between opposing ethnic labor forces.

As we can see, this would not explain ethnic relations adequately in Shandon where the new labor force is associated with a new crop. With the introduction of the new crop, displacement occurs from top to bottom, from owners to laborers. Displaced Anglo farm workers in grain, hay, and cattle leave the community, frequently for other grain, hay, and cattle regions, such as eastern Oregon. Owners generally displaced themselves by selling their land, retiring, and often moving away. No one competes with the Mexican immigrants for their jobs, except other immigrants. Only in that case can we observe some tensions along the lines of the Split Labor Market model, when the older immigrants from northwestern Mexico are replace by recent groups from Oaxaca in southern Mexico. But this is less common in Shandon than in some other locations in California.

Expressions of ethnic prejudice against immigrants in Shandon rarely concern labor market or workplace issues. (Older residents reported to me that they had asked vineyard managers if they really needed to hire Mexicans earlier during vineyard development. Managers responded that they did, because no one else would do the work. The older residents reported that they were satisfied, if disappointed, with this explanation and the matter was dropped.) The Split Labor Market model is more appropriate at a macro-historical level of analysis and for specific micro-sociological conditions. But it fails to capture the breadth of ethnic tensions in Shandon, or those which are most common.

The position of Latinos generally within the social system of the American Southwest is still often described in terms of an Internal Colonialism model (Barrera 1978). Again, this consists of a pervasive systematic institutionalized racial discrimination in education, employment, social relations, political rights, housing, *et cetera*, for which Barrera provides substantial historical evidence. Certainly, some of these conditions do exist in Shandon; however, they are substantially mitigated by what one former internal colonialism theorist refers to as America's internalization of the 1960s Civil Rights agenda (Prager 1987). Overall, however, the model of internal colonialism does not fit Shandon well.

There is very obvious occupational stratification: vineyard work is "reserved" in a sense for Mexican immigrants. Yet there is mobility within these ranks, and several Mexican farm workers in Shandon now operate as licensed labor contractors. And this occupational stratification is not based on race: occupational mobility of even the foreign born children of Mexican farm workers is extremely high. A Mexican immigrant now owns and operates the local cafe. Likewise, Mexican Americans in the community have a variety of occupations mostly outside agricultural employment.

The mobility afforded to children of farm workers results from the systematic institutionalized integration of Shandon schools, and indeed, the enforcement of an explicitly non-racial ethic of behavior. Class size is small and this assists integration immensely. Mexican children graduate at the same rate and move on to college and trade schools at the same fairly high rate as others.

With the exception of children, a strong ethnic boundary separates Shandon into two social communities: one American and the other Mexican. This boundary is crossed by some members of both groups, especially children, and by a number of Mexican Americans. Once again, the high level of integration among children is profoundly influenced by the local school system. Grade cohorts are small: from 15 to 30 students per grade. Children generally are forced by these

numerical circumstances to make friends across ethnic lines, or endure having fewer friends. Mexican kids attend Anglo social events, and vice versa much more so than do their parents or other adults.

Interethnic dating among local teens may be less common than dating within one's ethnic group, but there are always several visible examples of mixed dates at any one time. Still, teens do recognize that a barrier is being crossed in doing so, and teasing between teens over this issue illustrates the social pressures at work. Some Anglo parents strenuously object to interethnic dating. But, this hasn't stopped their children from doing it, and other Anglo parents are among their harshest critics in private.

Intermarriage between Anglo and Mexican American adults generates little or no local gossip and has no particular stigma attached to it. Between a Mexican immigrant and an Anglo it warrants discussion, but not open disapproval. But when a young couple moved into town in 1990 in which the husband was black and the wife white, this stimulated disapproving gossip in the local cafe in which the race of the young couple was specifically at issue. In marked contrast, there is no consensus regarding the racial status of Mexicans among Anglos and the matter is rarely discussed.

In fact, many Anglo residents drew a firm distinction between those Mexicans who had become members of the community and those who had not. Those that had were easily named families and individuals, typically who had settled during the 1970s if not earlier, and whose children were highly acculturated. The distinction was noted in very clearly cultural terms: those recognized as community members were described as "Americanized" or "Our" Mexicans, and were contrasted with "wetbacks" or "*Mexican* Mexicans." The "Americanized" category sometimes lumps Mexican Americans with highly acculturated immigrants.

Local organizations, such as the Lions Club and the volunteer firemen, do not recruit even the "Americanized" Mexicans. But both language barriers and the expense of dues prevent this as a purely practical matter. On the other hand, the local Lions chapter recruited three Mexican Americans, two in part because they offered a link to the Mexican residents of the community who benefited from Lions-sponsored eye care.

If one wants to observe flagrant systematic discrimination in Shandon, the arena in which to do so is the rental housing market. The stereotype that the Mexican is an inferior prospective tenant is pervasive. Every resident of Shandon can cite examples of Mexican tenants who failed to maintain the condition and appearance of a property, who were noisy neighbors, who lived in crowded and dirty conditions, bathed in their yards with a hose, etc. Another pervasive stereotype is that Mexicans do not mind, or even like, the dilapidated and crowded living conditions, because these conditions are better than what they had in Mexico. These cases and stereotypes are used to justify a systematic and fairly open practice of discrimination.

Even Mexican Americans experience some of this prejudice at least initially when trying to obtain rental housing. They, however, succeed at circumventing this with less effort than do Mexican immigrants. Moreover, many of them concur with the stereotypes about Mexicans as tenants.

Of course, there are many Anglos who do not condone these practices, or there would be no Mexicans at all in Shandon. Indeed, several Mexican families have even purchased homes. However, discrimination in the rental housing market contains the size of the local Mexican

population below a certain threshold, and is the only mechanism available to American residents to do so. It also regulates its composition, since greater tolerance is shown for renting to Mexican families than to groups of workers. The surplus of Mexican farm workers and their families, roughly two thirds of those employed on local farms and ranches, are shunned to other communities. Some of these workers commute 80 miles daily each way.

A last alternative model I will consider today contends that a latent ethnic tension between Americans and Mexican immigrants is exacerbated by economic hard times, leading to a "nativist spasm" (Cornelius 1982). This model has a great deal of merit, as we now witness a spasm of immigrant bashing during an important downturn in our state's economy.[2] But this model also is most effective on a macroscopic level, for agriculture is the most prosperous sector of the state's economy.

In Shandon, the grape growers are among the most prosperous members of the community during this time, while conditions were hard for many grain farmers. Indeed, this contributed to tensions between those two Anglo groups. A significant regional battle occurred over the use of broad-leaf herbicides on barley fields adjacent to vineyards, because of the crop damage sustained by grape growers. This lead to name calling such as "Damn grape growers," and "Damn barley growers" which can still be heard. The grape growers' heavy reliance on Mexican labor provided another point of contention in this. But for the most part, the grain growers remain economically viable, and even perform custom work for vineyards as a diversifying strategy.

But the visible success of grape growers has raised the social standing of at least these irrigation farmers to rival that of the large grain growers. The once higher status of the grain farmer is no longer assured. The biggest cattlemen are still considered to be the elite residents of the region, and two cattle ranchers continued their prosperity by establishing successful vineyards.

The late 1980s saw a new growth trend in Shandon, that of suburbanization, as young upwardly mobile urban workers purchased homes in the community. They too are not immune to the ethnic tensions surrounding Mexican immigration, yet there is no direct threat to their economic well-being.

The most vocal category of critics of Mexican settlement in Shandon are older retirees who suffer no economic threat from a Mexican presence. Some in fact profit from rents of houses, or sale of property for vineyard development. Yet, the content of their complaints is consistent and accurately represents the views expressed by Shandon residents from all backgrounds when criticizing Mexican immigrants.

Ethnic prejudice directed toward Mexican immigrants in Shandon centers on community: a place where one knows and understands the people and the social system, where one is assured of his or her own position in the local social system, and where the behavior of others complies with one's own values and sense of what is appropriate. There is a regular litany of specific complaints associated with this concern: 1) verbal harassment of women and girls by Mexican men, 2) public drinking and intoxication, 3) public urinating, 4) bathing in the yard with the garden hose, 5) failure to maintain the appearance of homes and yards, especially by allowing trash to accumulate, 6) excessive noise, especially playing Mexican music loudly, 7) crowding

[2] --A cautionary note: the current immigrant bashing in California is being nurtured by the state's major politicians as a campaign strategy this year. And what could be a better one, since immigrants do not vote?

into houses, 8) loitering in groups, "taking over" the bench at the Post Office, 9) failure to learn English, 10) non-participation in school activities which require parent involvement.

Mexican immigrants are viewed as reluctant to Americanize. Their commitment to life in America is questioned and doubted. It is felt that most intend to return to Mexico, and that those who do remain here will not adopt local customs. The behaviors listed above are routinely cited as evidence of this lack of commitment. Thus, the Mexican presence is viewed more as a cultural takeover which has or threatens to turn Shandon into a "Taco Town" or "Little Tijuana." Senior citizens in particular miss the Shandon of old in which they grew up and knew so well. From their point of view, the settlement of so many Mexican immigrants is the worst fate they can imagine for Shandon.

Longtime Anglo residents of Shandon are also quick to argue that the problems with Mexican immigrants were worse during the early 1980s than they were during my stay in the community. Some explained this by describing the Mexicans of the early '80s as a particularly bad, ill-manner bunch, who were too "macho" and were involved in suspicious activities. But a better and more frequently heard explanation is simply that during the early '80s fewer Mexican men in Shandon had their families there with them. Family responsibilities lent a noticeable air of tranquillity to the community. At roughly the same time that many Mexican families were coming to the community, a number of older homes rented by groups of Mexican adults were condemned and destroyed.

From these facts I draw a general conclusion about ethnic relations which differs from the split labor market, internal colonialism, and economic "hard times" models. I believe the experience of Shandon indicates that ***the scale and composition of foreign immigration stimulate a nativist reaction and increase ethnic tensions in the absence of racially divided labor markets, racially based systems of exploitation and discrimination, or economic crises.*** The sheer weight of numbers of unassimilated Mexican immigrants turns the home community into a strange and unknowable place, a change which the elderly feel most strongly. It is these older residents, after all, who have invested the most of their time and energy in the local social system. Their world is the most disrupted by this demographic shift.

If the immigrant population is comprised mostly of adults without families, these tensions are exacerbated. Tensions are cooled slightly when the immigrant population is composed more of whole families. At some level which is yet to be determined is an immigrant population threshold that the rest of the community struggles to maintain through discrimination in the rental housing market. This is why housing is the single most important arena of discrimination against immigrants, and why the other areas of discrimination and conflict predicted by internal colonialism and split labor market models fail to emerge.

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